

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 1036

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, NU

SUBJECT: PROVISIONAL PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSORS CHOSEN

SUMMARY: SENATE PRESIDENT PABLO RENER, EX-VICE PRESIDENT FRANCISCO URCUYO AND RIGOBERTO REYES WERE ELECTED BY THE CONGRESS FEB 28 TO BE CANDIDATES AS PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S SUCCESSOR SHOULD BE BE INCAPACITATED DURING THE CONGRESSIONAL RECESS ENDING APRIL 15. THE VOTE WAS VIEWED AS A BLOW TO LOWER HOUSE PRESIDENT CORNELIO HUECK, WHO WAS DISCOVERED TO BE INELIGIBLE FOR THE PRESIDENCY ON CONSTITUTIONAL GROUNDS A FEW DAYS BEFORE THE VOTE. THE VOTE BOOSTED THE SUCCESSION STOCK OF RENER IN THE SHORT-TERM AND URCUYO IN 1981. END SUMMARY

1. CONGRESS FULFILLED ITS CONSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN ITS LAST SESSION BEFORE RECESSING FOR 45 DAYS FEB 28 BY NOMINATING THREE OF ITS MEMBERS AS PRESIDENTIAL DESIGNATES. THOSE CHOSEN WERE SENATE PRESIDENT PABLO RENER, FORMER VICE-PRESIDENT (1967-72) FRANCISCO URCUYO MALIANO, AND GEN. (RET) RIGOBERTO REYES, AN ANCIENT COMRADE OF PRESIDENT SOMOZA GARCIA. THE THREE
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LIBERAL NAMES WERE POSED AGAINST THREE CONSERVATIVE NAMES

AND THE VOTE PROCEEDED ALONG STRICT PARTY LINES. DESPITE THE PARLIAMENTARY TRAPPINGS, IT WAS AN OPEN SECRET THAT THE THREE LIBERAL NAMES HAD BEEN SENT DOWN BY PRESIDENT SOMOZA DEBAYLE HIMSELF.

2. ACCORDING TO THE CONSTITUTION, THE NAMES ARE NOW FORWARDED TO PRESIDENT SOMOZA, WHO IS SUPPOSED TO DESIGNATE ONE OF THE THREE AS HIS SUCCESSOR IN CASE HE IS INCAPACITATED DURING THE PERIOD WHEN CONGRESS IS IN RECESS UNTIL APRIL 15. HE DOES NOT MAKE HIS CHOICE PUBLIC, BUT IS TO PLACE THE NAME IN A SEALED ENVELOPE, SECURE IT IN A SAFE PLACE (OTHERWISE UNSTIPULATED IN THE CONSTITUTION) WHERE IT IS TO BE OPENED IN THE EVENT THE CONTINGENCY ARISES (IF THE PRESIDENT DIES WHILE CONGRESS IS IN SESSION, THE CONGRESS FREELY ELECTS A PRESIDENT FROM AMONG ITS MEMBERS WITHOUT REGARD TO THE ABOVE PROCEDURE).

3. COMMENT: SOMOZA'S WELL-KNOWN AVERSION TO HAVING THE SUCCESSION DISCUSSED, HAS HAD A CHILLING EFFECT ON EVEN MILD SPECULATION ABOUT CONTINGENCIES WITHIN THE PARTY. AS SUCH, THE CONSTITUTIONAL EXERCISE MARKED THE FIRST TIME IN A COUPLE OF YEARS WHEN LIBERALS COULD OPENLY TALK ABOUT THE UNMENTIONABLE SUBJECT. IN PREPARING FOR THE VOTE, EARLY SPECULATION CENTERED AROUND THE AMBITIONS AND PERSONAL POWER ENJOYED BY LOWER HOUSE PRESIDENT CORNELIO HUECK. FOR THE FIRST TIME IT WAS RECOGNIZED THAT HUECK'S STANDING IN THE PARTY PLUS SUSPECTED DEALS WITH THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSERVATIVES MIGHT HAVE GIVEN HIM THE INSIDE TRACK TO THE PRESIDENCY IN CASE OF SOMOZA'S DEMISE. THE ANTI-HUECK LIBERALS LED BY HIS LONGTIME INTRA-PARTY RIVAL ORLANDO MONTENEGRO, AND SOMOZA RELATIVES LUIS PALLAIS DEBAYLE AND JOSE SOMOZA ABREGO LOBBIED HARD WITH PRESIDENT SOMOZA TO EXCLUDE HUECK'S NAME FROM THE THREE UP UNTIL LAST WEEK, APPARENTLY TO NO AVAIL. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS THAT LAST MINUTE HELP CAME FROM THE UNEXPECTED SOURCE OF PEDRO J. QUINTANILLA, LIBERAL DISSIDENT RAMIRO SACASA'S PRINCIPAL ADVISOR AND A PARTNER IN MONTEGEGRO'S LAW FIRM. QUINTANILLA DISCOVERED THAT NEITHER OF HUECK'S PARENTS HAD BEEN BORN IN NICARAGUA AND HELD THAT HIS NOMINATION WOULD, THEREFORE, BE UNCONSTITUTIONAL UNDER THE PROVISION CALLING FOR AT LEAST ONE PARENT TO BE BORN IN NICARAGUA TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR THE PRESIDENCY. MONTENEGRO WENT TO SOMOZA, OPINION IN HAND, ON FEB 24 AND CONVINCED HIM TO REFRAIN FROM SEEKING HUECK'S NOMINATION.

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4. WHILE IT MAY NEVER BE KNOWN WHOM SOMOZA HAS SELECTED AS HIS SUCCESSOR FOR THE 45 DAY PERIOD, THE DISQUALIFICATION OF HUECK HAS CONSIDERABLY ELEVATED RENER'S CHANCES OF BEING ELECTED TO SUCCEED IF SOMOZA SUCCUMBS WHILE CONGRESS IS IN SESSION.

5. THE DESIGNATION HAS ALSO IMPROVED THE POLITICAL STOCK OF

URCUYO WHO NOW MAY BE CONSIDERED A REASONABLE POSSIBILITY TO SUCCEED SOMOZA WHEN HIS PRESIDENTIAL TOUR EXPIRES. THE URCUYO FAMILY HAS IN RECENT YEARS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST POLITICALLY WELL CONNECTED WITH URCUYO'S SISTER THE WIDOW OF FORMER PRESIDENT LUIS SOMOZA, A BROTHER THE FATHER-IN-LAW OF PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S ELDER DAUGHTER, AND ANOTHER BROTHER THE FATHER-IN-LAW OF PEDRO JOAQUIN CHAMORRO'S ELDEST SON.

6. THE REYES NOMINATION WAS ATRIBUTE TO THE NATIONAL GUARD AND SENTIMENT.
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